



**INTERNATIONAL
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June 10, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman
House Committee of Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee of Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member:

On behalf of the approximately 750,000 active members and retirees of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), I urge you to support the *Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act of 2015* (H.R. 2358), legislation to improve the reliability of the electric grid and reduce the threat of wildfires from transmission and distribution facilities located on federal lands by expediting the process of vegetation management.

Vegetation management – more commonly known as tree trimming – on and around power lines has been widely recognized as an important tool for ensuring grid reliability. Keeping the approximately 71,613 miles of electric transmission and distribution lines located on federal lands clear of overgrown vegetation is the responsibility of electric utility companies and their ratepayers. However, in order to gain access to maintain their rights-of-way (ROW), utility companies must first get approval from federal agencies. Some electricity providers who employ IBEW members have expressed frustration with federal land managers who enforce access policies that are contradictory. They are also critical of a decision making process for removing hazardous trees that is not completed in a timely manner. Finally, they assert there is unnecessary redundancy in reviews and working requirements that add needless delays.

The Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act would help address these problems by creating a streamlined process with more consistent procedures thus allowing utilities to better manage their ROWs on federal lands. The proposed legislation allows sensible procedures to cut-through bureaucratic red tape in order to reduce delays that currently impede the ability of utilities to manage overgrowth in and around electric transmission and distribution lines. Such delays add costs and present a hazard to human safety, wildlife habitat, and the reliable delivery of electricity.

The *Electricity Reliability and Forest Protection Act of 2015* (H.R. 2358), introduced by Representatives Ryan Zinke (R-MT) and Kurt Schrader (D-OR), is common-sense bi-partisan legislation that will help electric utilities “keep the lights on.” I respectfully urge you to support this worthwhile legislation.

Sincerely yours,

Lonnie R. Stephenson
International President

LRS:mlm

Copy to Rep. John Fleming; Chairman; Water, Power, and Oceans Subcommittee
Rep. Jared Huffman; Ranking Member; Water, Power, and Oceans Subcommittee